

Yellow-Billed Cuckoo
(*Coccyzus americanus*)

STATUS: Candidate. Listing warranted as a Distinct Vertebrate Population Segment west of the crest of the Rocky Mountains, but precluded by higher priority listing actions (66 FR 38611, July 25, 2001).

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: The yellow-billed cuckoo is a medium-sized bird of about 30 cm (12 in) in length, and weighing about 60 g (2 oz). The species has a slender, long-tailed profile, with a fairly stout and slightly down-curved bill, which is blue-black with yellow on the basal half of the lower mandible (bill). Plumage is grayish-brown above and white below, with rufous primary flight feathers. The tail feathers are boldly patterned with black and white below. The legs are short and bluish-gray, and adults have a narrow, yellow eye ring. Juveniles resemble adults, except the tail patterning is less distinct, and the lower bill may have little or no yellow. Males and females differ slightly, as males tend to have a slightly larger bill.

HABITAT: Habitat for the species in the eastern United States consists of parks, riparian woodlands, and other deciduous woodlands. This is in contrast to habitat west of the Continental Divide, where suitable habitat is limited to narrow, and often widely separated, riparian cottonwood-willow galleries (salt cedar is also used by the cuckoo). Dense understory foliage appears to be an important factor in nest site selection, while cottonwood trees are an important foraging habitat in areas where the species has been studied in California. The species is usually found at elevations less than 2011 m (6,600 ft).

RANGE: Historic: In the west, based on historic accounts, the species was widespread and locally common in California and Arizona; locally common in a few river reaches in New Mexico; common very locally in Oregon and Washington; generally local and uncommon in scattered drainages of the arid and semiarid portions of western Colorado, western Wyoming, Idaho, Nevada, and Utah; and, probably uncommon and very local in British Columbia. Based on a 1986–87 statewide survey, only three areas in Arizona supported more than about five breeding pairs on a regular basis. In the Pacific Northwest, the last confirmed breeding records were in the 1930s in Washington and in the 1940s in Oregon. The species may now be extirpated from Washington.

Current/Potential: Arizona probably contains the largest remaining cuckoo population among States west of the Rocky Mountains, but cuckoo numbers in 1999 are substantially less than some previous estimates for Arizona as habitat has declined. One hundred sixty-eight yellow-billed cuckoo pairs and 80 single birds were located in Arizona in 1999, based on preliminary results from a State-wide survey which covered 426 km (265 mi) of river and creek bottoms. Losses of riparian habitats from historic levels have been substantial in Arizona. Despite this, the cuckoo is still found in all counties in Arizona. In Colorado and Idaho, the species is rare, and in Nevada, the remaining breeding populations are threatened with extinction, if not already extirpated. The portion of Texas west of the Pecos River has been identified as within the range of the historic western subspecies, but other authors consider birds from this area most similar to eastern cuckoos. The species occurs in the portion of Texas west of the Pecos River, but its conservation status is unknown. The species is widespread and uncommon to common in central and eastern Texas.

REASONS FOR DECLINE/VULNERABILITY: The loss, degradation, and fragmentation of riparian habitat have been identified as the primary factors causing yellow-billed cuckoo declines in the western United States. Estimates of riparian habitat losses include 90–95 percent for Arizona, 90 percent for New Mexico, 90–99 percent for California, and more than 70 percent nationwide. Distribution, population, and trend data indicate that, although regional declines have occurred, the yellow-billed cuckoo is relatively common as a breeding bird in much of the eastern United States.

LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP: Habitats in Arizona include lands owned by private, state, Tribal, and Federal entities.

NOTES: This species is listed as threatened by the state of Arizona (Arizona Game and Fish Department 1988).